

# DEFENCE AREA 34

## EWSHOT

### 1. Area details:

The defence area is 3 miles NW of Farnham and 3½ miles W of Aldershot.

County: Hampshire.

Parish: Crondall.

NGR: centre of area, SU 813505.

### 1.1 Area Description: [see Map 1].

The defence area lies close to the Hampshire/Surrey county boundary, just south of the suburbs of Fleet and Church Crookham which include an area of disused barracks that were occupied during the Second World War. This is an enclosed landscape of fields and woodland, intersected by narrow lanes bordered by thick hedges. Many of the fields north of Dare's Lane and below Ridding's Copse have been uncultivated for many years and are high with rank grass. Ridding's Copse itself is a rectangular-shaped block of thick deciduous and coniferous woodland lying astride a ridge. To the east of the little-used lane that runs on its south-eastern side is an area of unfenced grass and wood, crossed by a public footpath, that has the appearance of rough parkland. It occupies a ridge that slopes to the south-east to the village of Ewshot, which lies at the south-east corner of the defence area. Large houses and farms lie on the south side of Ewshot Lane, one of which is Seymour Farm, occupied by the military in 1940 as a battle headquarters.



*Fig. 1 - Looking north from Ewshot Lane at the heavily defended ridge in its 'parkland' setting north-west of Ewshot village. In 1940, at least two Vickers machine gun emplacements and two type 24 pillboxes could have covered these slopes with fire. A barbed wire fence also ran across the hillside.*

Beyond the southern edge of the defence area runs the A287 Farnham to Odiham road which, south of Ewshot, makes a junction with other roads at a point called Warren Corner. To the east of the area, the B3013 road cuts north to south through a now forested landscape of once sandy heathland. The western boundary of the area is formed by the continuation of Ewshot Lane as it curves north.



There are various viewsheds centred on Ridding's Copse, which forms the focus of the defence area, backed by the ridge above Ewshot to its east.

## 2. Assessment.

### 2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

#### *Defence overview -*

From late June 1940, GHQ Line 'A' was constructed through the area of Aldershot Command, running from south-west of Reading to Farnham. This Line was then continued further south and east by GHQ Line 'B' [see also Defence Area 51 - Chequers Bridge].<sup>1</sup> GHQ Line 'A' was divided into sectors falling within South Aldershot Sub-Area, two of which, Nos. 3 and 4, had their right and left flanks respectively anchored on Warren Corner in Crondall, south of the study defence area. The principal anti-tank obstacle was a machine-dug anti-tank ditch, and in front of that forward edge of the Line a demolition belt was planned.

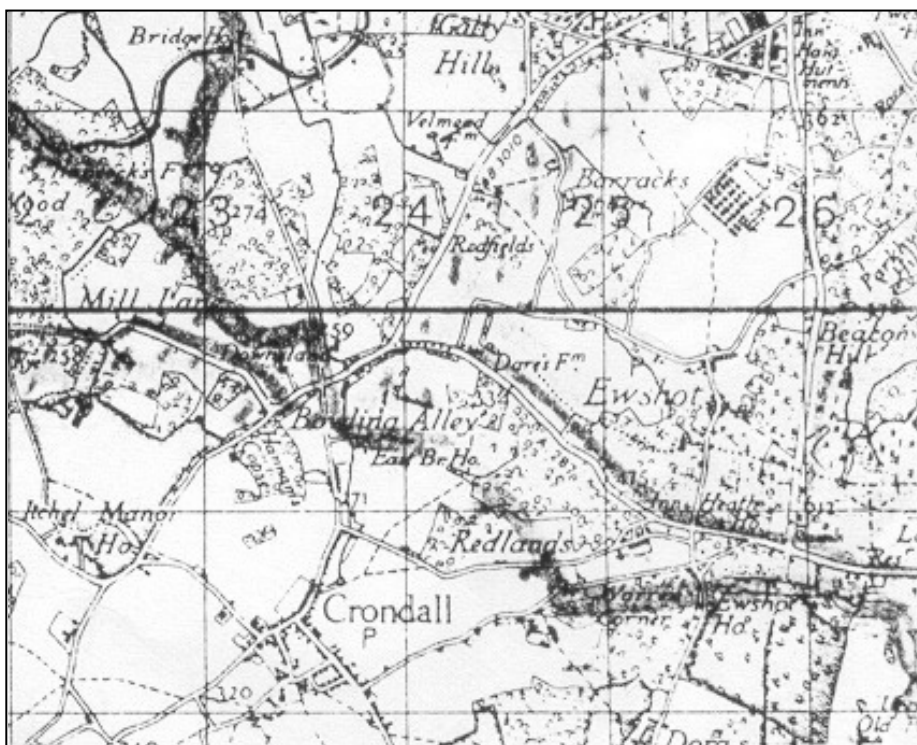


Fig. 2 - Portion of a 1940 Aldershot Command map showing the course [dark line] of GHQ Line 'A' between the villages of Ewshot and Crondall. Ridding's Copse and other features of the defence area can also be made out.<sup>2</sup>

No.3 Sector was also organised into three 'focal points' or defended localities made up of pillboxes, anti-tank mines, and roadblocks - at the Bowling Alley, Redlands, and Warren Corner itself. In August 1940, these points were defended by troops from the 1st Pioneer Battalion, Royal Canadian Engineers. The headquarters of this unit was based at Seymour Farm on Ewshot Lane, within the defence area. 'C' Company of the 25th Bn. Hampshire Home Guard also manned a series of defended localities, including minefields, to the rear.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, 'Ironside's Line', p55.

<sup>2</sup> Map from TNA: PRO WO 166/151.

<sup>3</sup> TNA: PRO WO 166/1258.



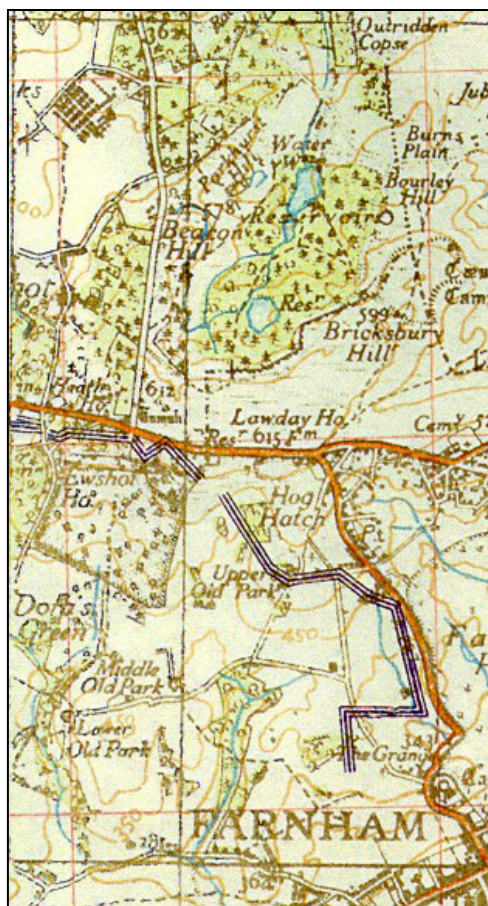


Fig. 3 - Portion of a German map showing the course of the anti-tank ditch [purple lines] to the immediate south-east of the defence area.<sup>4</sup>

Prepared as well to the rear of GHQ Line 'A' at Warren Corner was a heavily defended area around the village of Ewshot, based particularly on two hill positions to its north-west, with defence works firing south-west, south, and south-east. These are the principal defences at the heart of the study area. Ridding's Copse, surrounded as it is by pillboxes and with a barbed wire perimeter enclosing it, appears to form a focus to these defences, for a purpose that is not clear.

Earthworks that appear on air photographs to the immediate south-east of Ridding's Copse are dominated by fire from Vickers machine gun emplacements as well as lighter infantry pillboxes. It cannot be determined what type of military site is represented by these earthworks, and there

are no traces of them on the ground today, although the emplacements and pillboxes remain.

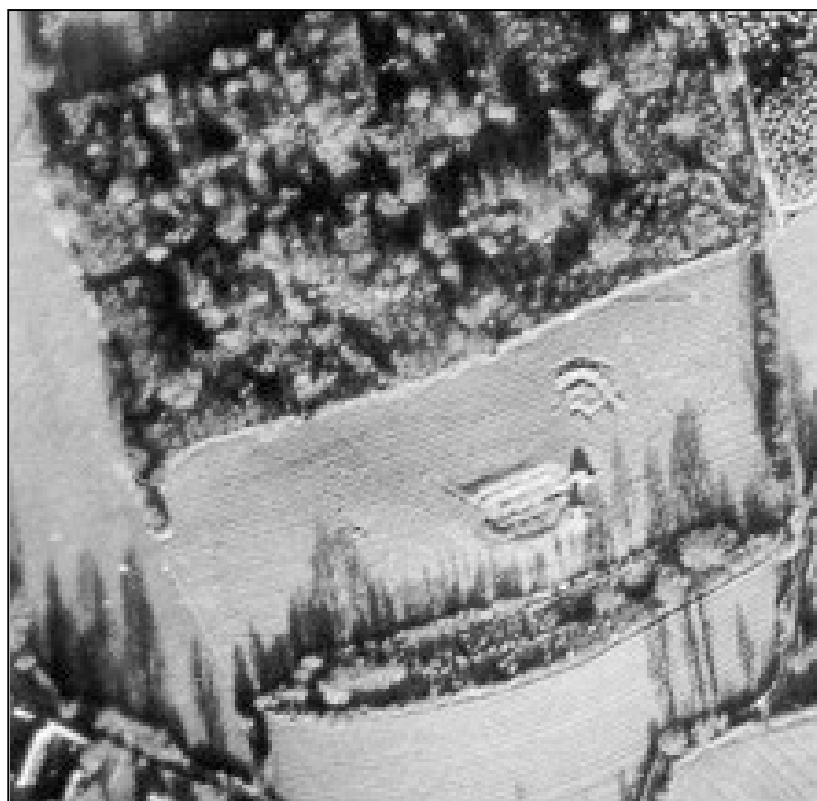


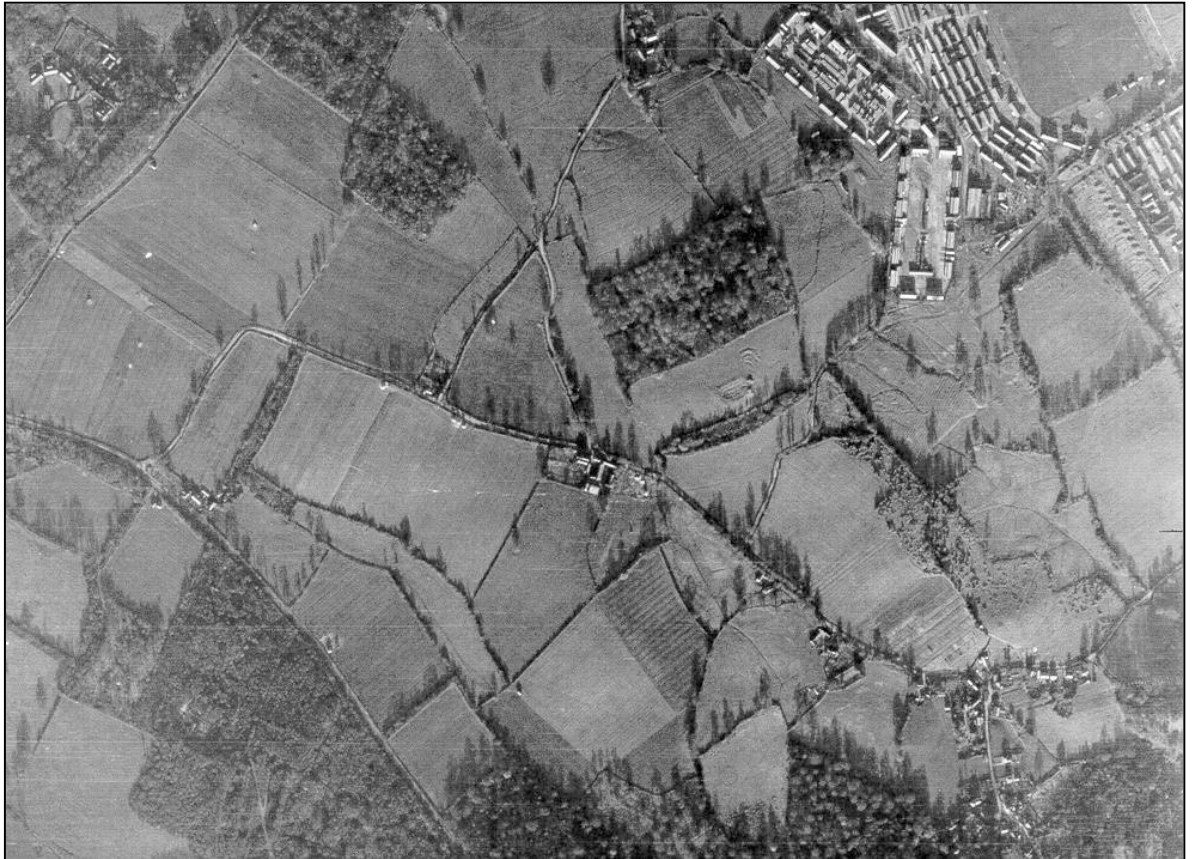
Fig. 4 - Portion of a December 1942 air photograph showing the unusual earthworks south-east of Ridding's Copse. The two Vickers machine gun emplacements, UORNs 16741 and 16742, can also be made out. The purpose of the earthworks is not known.

<sup>4</sup> Sheet 124: Befestigungskarte Grossbritannien 1:50,000 (BLML).





Although various Operation Instructions and Defence Schemes for the South Aldershot Sub-Area survive for 1940-1941, there is no reference within them to the defence of these areas north-west of Ewshot and in rear of GHQ Line 'A'. They are neither allocated to the Field Army or the Home Guard as defended localities. It is likely that the defence works were, in fact, constructed later in 1941 and 1942 for the greater protection of the barracks a short distance to the north at Church Crookham. As Ridding's Copse was defended on all sides, it appears to have had an important role within Aldershot Command, although what that was can at present only be speculation. Further documentary research, oral testimony, and archaeological fieldwork might hope to resolve this problem.



*Fig. 5 - A 1945 air photograph showing the landscape of the defence area. The village of Ewshot is at the bottom right-hand corner and Ridding's Copse towards the centre top, with the Church Crookham barracks close by. Dare's Lane and Ewshot Lane can be seen, with the A287 road running from the Bowling Alley towards Warren Corner at the bottom edge of the picture. The earthworks south-east of Ridding's Copse are still visible at this date, as are the two Vickers machine gun emplacements, UORNs 16741 and 16742.*

#### *The defence works -*

The defence area is very thickly defended with a mixture of Vickers machine gun emplacements and hexagonal type 24 infantry pillboxes. In the number of these defence works, and the closeness of their spacing, the area must be considered as one of the most heavily defended against infantry ground attack in the country. Many structures are heavily overgrown in an enclosed landscape of thick woods and hedges, and some are inaccessible in private paddocks and gardens. Others undoubtedly remain to be located. Further fieldwork for this purpose is required.

Four examples of the Vickers medium machine gun emplacement can be found, with two adjacent to Ridding's Copse and two on the ridge north-west of Ewshot. These are all brick-shuttered, with detached exterior blast walls and one main





embrasure for the Vickers machine gun. Side embrasures are also provided for the fire of lighter weapons. The two emplacements that stand on the south side of Ridding's Copse [UORNs 16741 and 16742] are angled to each other to allow converging fields of fire from their main embrasures. This concentration of fire is on the area of the principal earthwork [see 'Defence summary' above]. A type 24 pillbox facing north from the strip of woodland to the south-east could also have fired on this point, as could a further type 24 pillbox at the edge of Ridding's Copse.



*Fig. 6 - UORN 16741: Vickers machine gun emplacement close to Ridding's Copse, which can be seen in the background.*



*Fig. 7 - UORNs 16741 [left] and 16742. These Vickers machine gun emplacements were angled to each other so that their fire converged.*



On the ridge to the east of Ridding's Copse, separated from it by a shallow valley and a lane, are two further Vickers machine gun emplacements, UORNs 7860 and 7861. These fire down the slope to Ewshot Lane [see Fig. 1]. One emplacement [UORN 7861] is so badly overgrown it is virtually impossible to approach it.



*Fig. 8 - UORN 7861: the main embrasure of this Vickers machine gun emplacement stares out from its thick covering of impenetrable vegetation.*



*Fig. 9 - UORN 7860: this Vickers emplacement is one of a pair with UORN 7861. It was dug into the top of the ridge overlooking Ewshot Lane.*



At least six type 24 infantry pillboxes [further fieldwork will probably find more] surround Ridding's Copse on all sides, being placed just within the tree line so they do not show on air photographs. A further pillbox [UORN 16755] fires towards the Copse from the south. On the crest of the ridge to the east, three infantry pillboxes are situated amongst the trees behind the Vickers emplacements that are dug into the forward slopes. Two of these [UORNs 6795 and 16930] fire towards Ewshot village, protecting the eastern approaches to the ridge position.



*Fig. 10 - UORN 6795: type 24 pillbox at the eastern end of the ridge overlooking Ewshot village.*



*Fig. 11 - UORN 7865: type 24 pillbox protecting the western approaches to the Ewshot ridge.*





The village of Ewshot is surrounded by pillboxes. There is one dug into the side of Ewshot Lane on the outskirts of the village [UORN 9819], and another on a bank at its centre [UORN 7863], with a modern house now built above it. Other pillboxes stand by the side of Church Lane and Tadpole Lane, and at the edge of the recreation ground. Further field-work is necessary to confirm the positions of others. Another concentration of infantry pillboxes is around Seymour Farm, once the headquarters of this rear sector of GHQ Line 'A'.

*Fig. 12 - UORN 7863: type 24 pillbox at the centre of Ewshot village.*



*Fig. 13 - UORN 9827: the doorway and rear-facing embrasures of the type 24 pillbox next to Homecroft Farm in Ewshot village.*



## 2.2 **Landscape:**

There has been no significant development in the landscape of the defence area over the last sixty years, although the Church Crookham suburbs have developed to the north, and housing of Ewshot village spread to the south-east. The barracks at the north edge of the area have long since fallen out of use, but currently there are plans to develop the Queen Elizabeth Barracks to the north-east for housing which may put pressure on the landscape of the defence area and the narrow lanes that cross it.

The fields to the south of Ridding's Copse, and those around the eastern ridge, are part of the Defence Estate and are uncultivated. This fact has undoubtedly helped the survival of the machine gun emplacements, in particular, where they might otherwise have proved encumbrances in the middle of ploughed fields. Because of the park-like nature of much of the eastern ridge, there appears no restriction to roaming across it at will: it is crossed, in any event, by a public footpath running from the Queen Elizabeth Barracks to Ewshot village. Similarly, a perambulation of all but the north-west side of Ridding's Copse can be made to view the pillboxes at these locations, although the wood itself is fenced off with barbed wire.

Various of the pillboxes in Ewshot village stand on private land to which there is no access without permission, and the same is true of those in the area of Seymour Farm to the south of Ewshot Lane.

There is parking in Ewshot at the recreation ground, and it is possible to pull a car onto the grass verge at points in Dare's Lane.

## 2.3 **Statement of Significance:**

In terms of its concentration of defences protecting the rear of GHQ Line 'A' on the outskirts of Aldershot - the 'home of the British Army' - the defence area is very important. The sheer number of the hardened defence works within the area, and beyond its borders to the west, east, and south, make it arguably the most densely defended 1940 landscape in England.

The type 24 pillboxes and the Vickers machine gun emplacements, although mostly badly overgrown, are in good condition beneath their surrounding vegetation. The especially-designed Vickers medium machine gun emplacement is a relatively rare type, and there are four here (and possibly more to be recorded) in a small compass of ground.

Because of the enclosed, wooded, and overgrown nature of the landscape, undoubtedly further sites remain to be discovered. A local archaeological group would have an interesting project in surveying the area - probably extending beyond the borders given here - to produce a definitive record of what survives. This would involve gaining the permission of landowners to find structures hidden away on private property.

The mystery of the earthworks below Ridding's Copse [see 'Defence summary'] could also be explored further using documentary sources and oral testimony. Resistivity survey, or even excavation, might be used to determine the nature and purpose of the two areas of earthworks.





Because of the open, uncultivated nature of the landscape from Ridding's Copse to the ridge above Ewshot village, the defence structures, if freed of their overgrowth, would reappear almost as constructed in 1940-1942, and with the right initiative, permissions, and finance might be converted into a 'pillbox park' for public interest and education.

### 3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works in the Ewshot area be considered of national importance. They enable this part of the rear sector of GHQ Line 'A' to be interpreted, and provide evidence of the articulation of the defence and the inter-relationship of its functionally different components.
2. That consideration be given to carrying out further work to examine known defence structures omitted from the current survey, in particular those around Ewshot village and south of Ewshot Lane. Such work might well locate new sites.
3. That consideration be given to setting up a programme of work to examine the purpose of the earthworks south-east of Riddings Copse. This would make a most interesting project that could be one of the first to use modern archaeological techniques and ground survey equipment on a Second World War defence site.
4. That consideration be given, in an initiative with Hampshire County Council and the local authority, to making the condition of the defence structures north-west of Ewshot village more accessible to the public by removing some of their current overgrowth, such a programme of work perhaps being combined with another that would provide public access and information on the Second World War defence of the area and of the anti-invasion defences of the country in general.

### 4. **Supporting material.**

#### 4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1 and 6-13 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 28.8.2003 and 5.9.2003.

Fig. 4 - AC/146 fr.5104 (12.12.1942) - NMR.

Fig. 5 - 106G/UK/1062 fr.4001 (5.12.1945) - NMR.

#### 4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

'Operation Instructions No.6', 22.8.1940 (from South Aldershot Sub-Area War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1258.

[Map], 4.11.1940, issued with 'Aldershot Command Defence Scheme' (from Aldershot Command 'G' War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/151.

'Aldershot Area Defence Scheme', 15.3.1941 (from Aldershot Area War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1185.

Befestigungskarte Grossbritannien: 1:50,000 (Sheet 124), 1.6.1941 - BLML 1305(13).





[Correspondence of Henry Wills with A.C. Pinhorn, former Garrison Engineer at Aldershot], 1975 - Wills Collection, NMR.

4.3 **Published Sources:**

Colin Alexander, *Ironside's Line* (Historic Military Press, 1999).

Henry Wills, *Pillboxes: A Study of UK Defences 1940* (Leo Cooper, 1985).

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

HLA/425 frs.6022 and 6024 (23.3.1942) - NMR.

AC/146 fr.5104 (12.12.1942) - NMR.

106G/UK/1062 frs.3052 and 3054 (5.12.1945) - NMR.

106G/UK/1062 fr.4001 (5.12.1945) - NMR.

106G/UK/1093 fr.3132 (3.1.1946) - NMR.

106G/UK/1114 fr.3067 (12.1.1946) - NMR.

106G/UK/1114 fr.4079 (12.1.1946) - NMR.

82/866 fr.38 (12.3.1954) - NMR.

58/4662 frs.27-28 (1.9.1961) - NMR.

OS/64026 fr.82 (15.5.1964) - NMR.

OS/71367 fr.202 (13.7.1971) - NMR.

4.5 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plans:**

SU 8049-8149 (1974) - BLML.

SU 8050-8150 (1974) - BLML.

SU 8249-8349 (1974) - BLML.

SU 8250-8350 (1974) - BLML.

4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**

[see 5. 'Annex'].

